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Sandinista Says Rebels Fail to Block Coffee Crop

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MATAGALPA, Nicaragua, Jan. 1 — Bureaucratic problems within the Sandinista Government have harmed the Nicaraguan coffee harvest more than rebel attacks, a senior Sandinista official said today.

"The most serious problem is lack of transportation," said the official, Daniel Núñez, who is in charge of the coffee harvest in Matagalpa and Jinotega Provinces, where two-thirds of Nicaragua's coffee is grown. "The resources are there. The problem is to focus the rest of the country on this region."

Coffee is Nicaragua's main source of foreign exchange, and the hard-pressed Sandinista Government has said that all possible resources would be allocated to the harvest. Rebel troops, known as contras, threatened to launch a concentrated offensive to disrupt it.

"With all the help the contras have gotten, they haven't been able to do very much," Mr. Núñez said in an interview. He said there had been four attacks on state-owned coffee farms since the harvest began in October, far fewer than had been expected.

Daniel Ortega Saavedra, the Nicaraguan President-elect, toured Matagalpa and Jinotega on Monday accom-

panied by other top officials. Mr. Núñez said that Mr. Ortega's presence reflected the relative tranquillity in the region.

Rebel forces have received more than \$100 million in covert aid from the United States, but the aid was suspended by Congress before the end of last year's session. President Reagan has indicated he will press for its renewal after Congress convenes this month.

In the interview in his office, Mr. Núñez speculated that rebel forces were weakening.

"It could be that the contras have peaked," he said. "I think that in 1985

the contras will suffer serious political, military and even economic blows."

Prospects for a renewal of American covert aid to the insurgents are considered questionable, and Congress will soon consider opening an investigation of atrocities and other human rights violations purportedly committed by rebel forces. But rebel leaders say they are confident the aid will be approved. They point to the continuing economic decline in Nicaragua and the consequent increase in public discontent as signs that the regime is losing strength.

Peddlers Called a Danger

Mr. Núñez said today that he believes the country's estimated 4,000 licensed street-corner salesmen pose a greater danger to the revolutionary process than armed insurgents. Some of these traders import goods that are

generally unavailable and sell them at high prices, while others buy at subsidized government markets and then resell their purchases for profit.

In recent weeks, the Sandinista press has been clamoring for a crackdown on these independent peddlers, whom it blames for pushing the price of many goods beyond the reach of ordinary Nicaraguans.

"These people are the political arm of the contras," Mr. Núñez said. "There is a whole Mafia of salesmen. I know, I was a salesman myself."

Mr. Núñez said many residents of northern Nicaragua believe that cities near the traditionally prosperous Pacific coast, including Managua, are receiving preferential treatment in the distribution of goods.

"If every Nicaraguan child in the most distant corner of the country can-

not get a toy for Christmas, better not to import any toys at all," he said. "The northern zones have known nothing but war for two generations. It is time for the Pacific to give us a little support."

Mr. Núñez said that government employees were selling items earmarked for controlled distribution at exorbitant prices and that they should be dismissed from their posts. "For me, it is more important to end this speculation than to defeat the contras," he said.

He said that during President-elect Ortega's visit here Monday, the two men spoke privately and agreed strict new economic measures were in order. Asked if he expected Mr. Ortega to announce them in his inaugural address next week, Mr. Núñez replied: "It should be. It has to be."